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ABSTRACT

Although research strongly supports the facilitative nature of empathy in all helping relationships, there is a need for the experimental assessment of the differential effects of procedures designed to maximize this skill. Resident assistants (N=154) participated in a study to compare programmed and didactic training methods and to determine the retention of any gains. Results indicated that while the didactic and the Empathy Enhancement Tapes (EET) were both effective training approaches, the EET was superior at the completion of training. Both experimental groups retained their increased levels of accurate empathy over a 4-week span; any differences between the two treatments were extinguished by that time. The findings suggest that empathic ability can be enhanced in an environment in which the training does not offer empathic understanding. (JAC)

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THE DEVELOPMENT AND VALIDATION OF PROGRAMMED EMPATHY TRAINING

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Empathy as an important ingredient in counseling, psychotherapy, and other helping relationships receives considerable support in both the theoretical and research literature (Carkhuff, 1969; Carkhuff and Berenson, 1967; Rogers, 1951). The explication of the relationship between high levels of accurate empathy and helpee gain has precipitated the development of various systematic training models to enhance this skill in trainees. While research data are available that strongly support the facilitative nature of accurate empathy in all helping relationships, there is a need for experimental assessment of the differential effects of procedures designed to maximize this skill.

Two important approaches to the training of accurate empathy are the didactic and programmed methods. Although a number of studies are reported that support the effectiveness of didactic and programmed models in the training of accurate empathic understanding, little data is available concerning the comparative effectivenss of these models. Another important factor in empathy training is the matter of retention of the gains achieved.

The purpose of the present study was to make comparative assessments of programmed and didactic modes of training. Additionally, this study sought to determine the retention of any gains made during training.

METHOD

Subjects

The subjects for this investigation were drawn from the population of 154 resident advisors working in the dormitories of the University of Maine. During an in-service

training period fourteen resident advisors selected a module in "Interpersonal Relationship Skills." These fourteen volunteers were subsequently randomly divided into two experimental groups, one of which received programmed empathy training via the Empathy Enhancement Tapes and one of which received didactic group training from this writer. Two control groups were utilized in this study. These groups were formed by securing thirteen volunteers from the remainder of the resident advisor population and subsequently dividing them into pre-test/post-test and post-test only control groups.

Procedures

Experimental subjects were initially randomly divided into two groups of seven numbers each. Programmed subjects received individual training via the Empathy Enhancement Tapes (EET). The EET is a set of three cassette tapes with accompanying keyed printed material developed by this writer. Each tape is approximately one hour in length and is completely self-explanatory, allowing each trainee to learn independently of other persons. The tapes are generally structured in accordance with the definition of Carkhuff (1969) that views accurate empathy as a two part process involving discrimination and communication of affective content.

The learner first receives an explanation of the nature of empathy and its importance in all effective interpersonal relationships. The initial task of the learner is to label the affective content being expressed by a presented helpee (role-played on the tapes). The trainee must then write down exactly what has been said. Following a pause for the completion of the tasks, the learner receives feedback on the accuracy and specificity of the label applied, as well as feedback as to what the written response should have been. Gradually the task changes so that the interaction becomes more realistic. The learner must next repeat the helpee statements, changing only the pronouns (i.e., "You feel depressed." in response to "I feel depressed."). Eventually the learner must produce spontaneous accurately empathic

responses to a role-played helpee. Throughout the tapes the learner receives immediate feedback on the quality of the responses produced.

Didactically trained subjects received their training as a group from this writer. The three training sessions consisted of the didactic-intellectual approach modeled after that of Carkhuff (1969). Training sessions included lectures, role-playing, group discussion and simulated helpees on tape.

Thirteen control subjects participated in this study and were divided into two groups. These subjects were volunteers from the pool of resident advisors who had participated in other types of in-service training. Control Group I (C-1) consisted of seven members and received pre-testing and post-testing for level of accurate empathy. Control Group II (C-2) consisted of six members and received post-testing for level of accurate empathy. This procedure was utilized to determine what effects, if any, exposure to the stimulus videotape had on empathic ability.

Data Gathering

All pre-testing, post-testing and post-post-testing conducted was accomplished by asking the subjects to make a written response "that you believe will be helpful" to 25 of the stimulus segments of the videotape "Critical Moments in Counseling" (Thayer, Peterson, Carr and Merz, 1972). Subjects viewed five trial segments that did not require a response in order to orient them to the procedure. They subsequently viewed segments six through thirty and made a written response to each.

Analysis

Each subject's written responses (pre-testing, post-testing and post-post-testing) were independently blindly rated by two trained raters (inter-rater reliability = .87). Each response was rated using Carkhuff's "Empathic Understanding in Interpersonal Processes: A Scale for Measurement" (1969). A mean score was computed for each subject for each testing of the four groups. Table 1 presents the means of each group for each assessment.

TABLE 1

Mean Scores for All Groups for All Testing

	Experimental Group I	Experimental Group 2	Control Group 1	Control Group 2
Pre-test	1.13	1.04	1.04	----
Post-test	2.19	2.07	1.05	1.03
Post-post-test	2.10	2.09	----	----

RESULTS

A single classification analysis of variance was utilized to examine the man pre-test levels of accurate empathy of E-1, E-2 and C-1. Since the obtained F value was not significant, it was assumed that E-1, E-2 and C-1 were initially equivalent in ability. A second single classification analysis of variance was utilized to examine the mean post-test levels of accurate empathy of E-1, E-2, C-1 and C-2. Since the obtained F value was significant beyond the .01 level, Duncan's Multiple Range Test was used to determine which pairs of mean scores were significantly different. This procedure revealed that E-1 was significantly ($p < .05$) higher in empathic ability than E-2, C-1 and C-2 at the completion of training. E-2 was also found to be significantly ($p < .05$) higher in empathic ability than C-1 and C-2 at the completion of training. No significant difference was evident between the post-test mean levels of accurate empathy of C-1 and C-2.

Further analysis was conducted using a factorial analysis of variance. This procedure examined the possibility of significant differences between the pre-test, post-test and post-post-test mean levels of accurate empathy of E-1 and E-2. Since the obtained F value was significant beyond the .01 level, Duncan's Multiple Range Test was again used to determine which pairs of mean scores were significantly different. The post-test mean levels of accurate empathy of E-1 and E-2 were significantly ($p < .05$) higher than the pre-test mean levels for those groups. Further examination of the data revealed that there were no significant differences between the post-test and post-post-test mean levels of accurate empathy of E-1 and E-2. Finally, there was no significant difference between the post-post-test mean levels of accurate empathy of E-1 and E-2.

A one-tailed, paired t-test revealed no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test mean levels of accurate empathy of C-1. A two-tailed, unpaired

t-test revealed no significant difference between the pre-test mean level of accurate empathy of C-1 and the post-test mean level of accurate empathy of C-2.

DISCUSSION

This study provides some empirical evidence which compares the efficacy of two approaches to the training of empathy. The results suggest that while the didactic and the EET training approaches are both effective approaches to training, the EET is superior at the completion of training. The multiple comparisons also revealed that both experimental groups retained their increased mean levels of accurate empathy over a four week span, and any differences between the two treatments were washed out by that time. The results also suggest that neither the time interval between pre-testing and post-testing nor exposure to the stimulus videotape had a significant impact on the mean levels of accurate empathic understanding.

One interesting implication of this research relates to the conditions under which increased levels of facilitative functioning may be obtained. Carkhuff (1969) indicates that successful training in the core conditions of helping must take place in an atmosphere where the same core conditions are offered by the trainer(s). Since there was no opportunity for the EET to provide such conditions, Carkhuff's position must be questioned. The results of this study suggest that empathic ability can be enhanced in an environment in which the training does not offer empathic understanding.

One theoretical explanation of this finding may have to do with the conceptualized nature of empathy. It is conceivable that empathy is a two-dimensional characteristic, composed of skills and personal adjustement. This conceptualization would maintain that interpersonal empathic understanding is a function of both skills and "self-actualization." Thus, the enhancement of empathic ability could be composed of skills training, "therapy", or some combination of the two

If we assume that most individuals have already achieved a certain level of

self-actualization, we must then conclude that their low level of empathic understanding is primarily a function of lack of skills. These skills can quickly be learned, but only to a point commensurate with their personal adjustment.

The result of this study indicates that the gains made in level of empathic understanding during programmed and didactic empathy training are retained. This corroborates the findings of Holder (1970), and Butler and Hansen (1973). This implies that empathic ability does not regress toward the previous levels. One explanation for this might be that the higher levels of functioning are reinforced by the interpersonal environment of the trainees, and are maintained. An alternate explanation may be that the effects of the training were sufficiently integrated within the trainees. This would suggest that training provides more than a set of techniques to be employed, but provides for the development of new and stable personality variables.

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BRIEF HISTORY OF THE EMPATHY ENHANCEMENT TAPES

The Empathy Enhancement Tapes were orginally conceived by the author in 1970 during the completion of the M.A. program in counseling at Eastern Michigan University. Actual development of the series began in 1972 while the author was enrolled in the Ed.D. program at the University of Maine. The original series was completed in 1973 and recorded on home equipment. This resulted in tapes that lacked professional "polish" and reproduction. The comparative effectiveness of the EET was assessed in the author's doctoral dissertation. This research indicated that the tapes were effective in that they raised the mean level of empathic understanding from 1.13 to 2.19 on Carkhuff's five point scale. Gains were retained over a four week span. (See attached research report)

The EET have been used extensively with graduate students in Counselor Education and Teacher Education at Auburn University at Montgomery since 1973. Student feedback has been positive and the author has received considerable encouragement to publish the materials. Each person who has completed the EET has completed an evaluation form that covers relevant personal reactions to the training methodology. The attached summary sheet provides means for the first 164 respondents who received this training.

Because of the positive feedback and encouragement of the trainees, the author completed a significant revision of the EET in 1978. This included minor revisions in the material, an expansion of some of the concepts, additional helpee stimulus statements, and the use of professional quality studio equipment. This last factor yielded the most important changes in the materials. Subsequent personal evaluations of the EET (see attachment) have shown improvement in the clarity of the voices

(question #2) as well as overall gains. Empirical support for the effectiveness of the revised EET was provided by William Crabb, doctoral candidate in Counselor Education at Auburn University, in 1981. He found that the EET improved the level of empathic understanding from 1.08 to 2.41. These gains were also retained over time. He also found that the tapes used in conjunction with modified Microtraining resulted in gains to a 2.73 level rather than a gain to 1.81 for Microtraining alone. The tapes used in conjunction with modified Systematic Human Relations Training yielded a gain to 2.62 rather than a gain to 2.11 for the SHRT alone.

The author completed the necessary forms for copyright registration in April, 1981. He is presently exploring avenues for publishing these materials through established publishing houses.

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